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# **Colonizing Ideas: A Comparative Look at Receptivity to the Adoption of Western Education in Japan and Ethiopia**

Getachew Felleke

## **Abstract**

This paper examines the challenges and promises that accompanied the introduction of modern education into two non-modern societies. The study is motivated by an interest to fathom some of the causes and sources of Ethiopia's multifaceted social and economic problems. Taking as its point of departure the view that, over the long run, evolutionary progress of societies should be the norm, the study seeks to identify the impediments that have blocked such a normal pace of progress in Ethiopia. Ethiopia's early experience in building up its education system is compared and contrasted with that of Japan's. The roles played by several factors in the modernization experiences of the two countries are identified and analyzed. The roots of Ethiopia's problems are shown to go back centuries. Mistakes of both omission and commission had been made at critical junctures in the country's history. In recognition of the cumulative and debilitating impacts that these mistakes have had on the country, the study takes a hard look at the roles of institutions and the quality of national leadership during the formative years of modern Ethiopia. The paper concludes with a personal reflection on the nature of the modernization dilemma that the country presently faces.

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“The theme of modernization, for the sake of strength, likewise found expression in another poem, which declared, in the words of the Psalms, that counsel was beautiful for those who accepted it, and concluded:

He who accepted it, fears no one.  
He will become like Japan, strong in everything.”<sup>1</sup>

The irony with the content of the above poem is that it nestles its endorsement of progress in a message that is both traditional and faith bound. In that, it is a poem that epitomizes Ethiopia's very tentative efforts at modernization. It may have been intended as a clever scheme to tame the resistance from numerous powerful conservative groups in the country. But it can also be pointed to as quite symbolic of the ambivalence, contradictions and fits-and-starts that have characterized the nation's efforts at modernization. In this, Ethiopia was very much unlike Japan.

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## **Education and Modernization**

However one defines it, an important feature of modernization is that societies undergo varying levels of transformations in their social, cultural and economic lives. Some of these transformations are readily sought and embraced. But some others are neither anticipated nor universally desired. Whatever the outcome, education and the education system of a country often play far-reaching and enduring roles in redefining both the direction and pace of such transformations. Thus, whenever it is allowed to take its own natural course of evolution, education inevitably implies change and transformation. Over the long term, the instance of such change as well as the pace and direction that it

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<sup>1</sup> In Richard Pankhurst, History of Education, Printing and Literacy in Ethiopia, in Addis Tribune Archives, 02, 10, '98

acquires tend to take a life of their own regardless of the intents and designs of any contemporary champions of education. However, this long term can be made even longer depending on the frequency and strength of resistance points that may get placed on the path of education reform in the interim. Accordingly, the impact that an education system can register in ushering in social and economic transformations varies from one society and one time period to another.

How is education connected to the social and economic transformation of societies? Other things being equal, a popular and practical function of education has been the generation of specific skills that help solve the prevailing puzzles of life in a specific society at a specific time. The practicality and adequacy of an education system rests on how well it tailors itself to meeting these specific societal puzzles head-on. To that extent, a society needs to cultivate its own customized education system to solve its own puzzles. This is about making or selecting a tool that matches the requirements of the task at hand; it is about a society ensuring that its education system is relevant to its own particular needs. In short, it is about learning how to learn well in order to live well. The relevance of education to society and the benefits of developing an education system that proves relevant to that society are seldom in question. But what strategy in education must a society follow to ensure such an outcome? Here, the answer to this last question is anything but simple. A society is seldom endowed with a single end, even when that end concerns its choice of an education system. It has multiple and even conflicting ends with multiple stakeholders. An important question to ask then is “what consensus exists on the particular strategy of education that may be needed in a society at any one time?” And who says what education is needed? The following quotation further highlights this point:

Education reflects a society’s capacity to produce, reproduce, adapt, and consume itself because it is both an agent and a product of those pursuits. Diverse and often complex educational formations—each one distinguished by its own particular configuration of accepted knowledge, theory, practice, and institutions—that appear and disappear over the course of a society’s history as it attempts to act upon itself and its environment, reproduce itself, and endow itself with meaning are neither created nor sanctioned by metasocial, evolutionary forces acting upon that society. Rather, they are produced by that society, within a “field of conflictive creation” that is marked by competing class interests and animated by “debates and conflicts, political initiatives and claims, ideologies and alienations.”<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the contents and the relevance of an education system may be specific to a particular society and to a particular period in a country’s history. But this specificity may not necessarily be a reflection of a “master plan” scheme to address some generally agreed-upon social and economic needs of society as a whole. Rather, it often represents a compromise between the ever shifting, evolving, and mostly conflicting interests of various groups in society. As the views, interests and preferences of the dominant groups go, so goes the form and content of education that is put in place. The system of education built around such compromise can last so long as the coalition of interest from which it receives its support can be sustained.

For many developed as well as developing societies with education systems that are mostly of home grown varieties, the role that education plays in society may be sheltered from controversies during long periods of social and economic stability. It may be

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<sup>2</sup>Beauchamp, Edward R., *Windows on Japanese Education*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1991 p. 2

assumed that an education system's very existence evinces a gradual process of accommodations and adjustments to the social, cultural and idiosyncratic requirements by and within which it evolved. This is similar to the concept of what naturalists call "co-evolution." The system of education in place caters to the expressed requirements of the society, and the society comes to claim and protect the system as an asset that is uniquely its own. This process of accommodation and adjustment is what lends the education system its social relevance and shields it from challenges and attacks. Such social relevance of an education system is preserved for the duration that the social and economic environment in which it evolved is also preserved. But as soon as that social and economic environment faces challenges from internal or external sources, the existing system of education begins to appear lacking and outdated. This will soon invite overt challenges and calls for reform.

While challenges to existing education can develop fairly rapidly in the face of a social environment that is in crisis, attempts at reforming it can prove both contentious and painfully time consuming. And where the threat to the environment originates externally, the questioning and challenges that are directed at the existing system of education are often accompanied by a search for an external model of education that would prove more in tune with a society's current and future needs.

Some time during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, two countries, Japan and Ethiopia, found their existing social and economic systems under challenge as a result of externally generated crisis that each country was ill prepared to face. As an extension of this social and economic crisis, the existing system of education in each country was found to be wanting. There was an early recognition and commitment in Japan that major reforms in education needed to be implemented quickly. Ethiopia's interest and efforts in bringing about such reforms was more gradual than Japan's. In either case, each country sought to import and apply western education as a means of accelerating its economic and social modernization.

An imported system of education, unlike the home grown variety of education, cannot deflect controversies for long. Importing an entire education system amounts to an experiment in which a society's transformation is driven by an education that had evolved in distant places with dissimilar economic, social and cultural idiosyncrasies. It is an experiment with many risks attached to it. It is also an experiment that inevitably invites controversies.

This paper examines conditions that surrounded the introduction of western education into Japan and Ethiopia during the early stages of their respective modernization. It will analyze the level of receptivity for adopting an imported system of education in the two countries. Official roles in the adoption of modern education in the two countries will be compared and contrasted. More importantly, the various factors that came into play in either impeding or enhancing attempts at education modernization in both countries will be studied. The paper will conclude by exploring and discussing some probable implications of the two countries' track records in modernizing their respective education systems.

### **Education and the Market**

Applying a strictly economic model, a human resource perspective of education is perhaps the least complex of educational philosophies to study. In its simplest form, it

implies the generation and harnessing of knowledge for the purpose of enhancing society's cultural and material wellbeing. It is about the deployment of more economic resources through the formation of additional human capital. Education and education institutions serve as resource markets that produce and supply human capital. When they function efficiently, they respond to the changing requirements of market demand by making available the right quantity and quality of such a resource at the market clearing price.

As is the case with other goods and services, the efficiency of the market is displayed in its capacity to provide answers to numerous demand and supply problems. How do we establish how much, and what type, of human capital is needed? How is this human capital to be produced and deployed? Do these and other complex questions present a challenge? May be so. But these are precisely the types of questions for which the market is said to offer answers. For the subtle and not so subtle communication that goes on between suppliers and consumers of human capital will, sooner or later, find an efficient resolution to these questions. The supply in human capital surges and ebbs in response to the green and red light signals issued by market determined prices for specific skills. The market thus serves as an efficient clearing-house for sorting out the numerous decisions on the type and level of human capital to be produced.

Does the market offer all the necessary clues on means and methods of human capital formation? The answer to this has to be contingent on whether we can assume that information and all other market supporting institutions do exist for the market to function as it is intended to do. In other words, for decisions on human capital formation to rely on the market, the market has to exist first. But what if there is no market to speak of? What if there are no price-signals to guide decisions on human capital development? What if education as a modern day resource remains a yet unfamiliar concept? What happens then?

### **Two Phases of Education**

There are at least two problems that materialize when applying the market approach to the process of human capital development. The first problem has to do with the phases through which a society's education evolves. It is possible to identify two such phases, education for literacy and education for advancement. But only one of these two phases can respond well to influences of the market. The second problem concerns the attempts to transfer modern education in either of the two phases to non-modern societies. A great social, economic, and cultural disconnect exists between the point of "supply" where such education originates and the point of "demand" where it gets consumed.

The first of these dual phases, education for literacy, involves the formal and organized means for reproducing and disseminating society's existing know-what and know-how. Such education serves as a means for the reproduction of existing knowledge. It is reproductive in its aims in that it is intended to increase the size of the population with access to an existing type and level of education. The type and level of education found in a few geographic or cultural corners of a country get disseminated to include a much larger and broader population group. To borrow a concept from development economics, education for literacy is a phase that can be described as education widening. Its accomplishments are measured by national statistics indicating number of schools, students enrolled in schools, national literacy rates, etc.

The second phase, education for advancement, is that of education as an incubator of new knowledge for tackling society's numerous needs and problems. Such education is conducted at colleges, universities, research institutes and major laboratories. It serves as the driving force for invention, innovation, and diffusion of new knowledge. It is mostly concerned about building specialized skills and technologies for fixing some of society's knotty problems and challenges. This may be referred to as "education deepening" to underline its contributions to the expansion and enrichment of human knowledge. Progress in this type of education is measured by the number and prestige of academics and scientists as well as by the quantity and quality of higher education and R&D establishments within a country.

How does the above dichotomy of "education widening" and "education deepening" bear on our understanding of the issue of education modernization? More specifically, what bearing does it have on our analysis of the market's role in the development of the two phases of education? Let us examine the potentials for such market role in each phase of education.

#### Education Deepening

Looking at "education deepening" first, its association with the development of specialized skills clearly hints at a role that the market can play. For example, if the costs of acquiring specialized skills are high, as they often tend to be, it follows that going for such skills represents an important investment decision on the part of both individuals and society. Given that, returns on investment must become important considerations in decisions to undertake education deepening. The strength of demand for such skills is what justifies investments to supply such skills. In this type of education, the market is at its best in doing its job of efficient allocation of a highly scarce resource. The tandem impact of market demand and supply is what shapes the development of this variant of education. Absent distortions and impediments originating in non-market sources, education deepening relies on the fairly accurate signals that flow from a well-developed and smooth functioning market.

Distortions and impediments do exist, however. It matters that the market signals which education deepening responds to do actually originate within the social environment of its eventual application and use. Where the market signals originate from across both geographic and cultural boundaries, distortions will occur that could impact on the relevance of education deepening. The triumph of a particular segment of computer engineering and engineers in a developed country such as England cannot be a basis for a national strategy on education deepening in Ethiopia. But, one may ask, decision makers in countries such as Ethiopia cannot knowingly commit such an obvious error, can they? The answer to this question is not as simple as it may seem.

Demand and supply decisions by market actors are often swayed by the amount of reliable and low cost information available to them. Given the contemporary global market concentration in information production and dissemination, it is not unthinkable that Ethiopian educators and students are more informed about labor market prospects in England, U.S., and Canada than they are about those in Ethiopia. Strategies for education deepening may end up responding to the only "market signals" that are available, even when such signals may have little relationship to the country's particular needs. Distorted signals lead to distorted policies and decisions. The more severe the distortion, the greater the gulf that separates the skills and aspirations of the "educated" from the social and

economic realities of the society that educated them. When that happens, education deepening represents a socially wasteful investment whose costs to society will far exceed its benefits. An education-starved country may end up producing educators that it is not yet prepared to make full use of.

It is important to note, though, that this mismatch between demand and supply for education deepening occurs not because market signals do not apply here, but because decision-makers tend to respond to the wrong market signals. The problem can be resolved when local and national market signals gain sufficient strength to become at least as compelling to the attentions and interest of decision-makers as the market signals from abroad. This occurs when various modern social and economic institutions are already in place and provide the needed support for a market system to function properly. It is possible to conclude from this that making optimal decisions on education deepening faces a much better prospect during later stages of a country's modernization than during earlier ones.

Issues surrounding education deepening gain in significance at later stages of a country's modernization process while education widening presents a challenge right from the outset of that process. And as the focus of this paper is the challenge of education reform at the outset of a country's modernization efforts, we will now turn our focus on the aspect of reform that concerns education widening.

#### Education Widening

Education widening, as defined above, is about spreading out the benefits of education in its existing form. The driving force behind this is the recognition that this type of education is a "public good." That is, its acquisition by a part of society will have benefits for the whole of society. Given its "public good" nature, the market tends to understate the benefits and overstate the costs of such education. If so, the market is likely to "under-produce" this type of education. For this reason, the market is generally regarded not to be the most suitable mechanism for providing this variant of education. Accordingly, the production and dissemination of such education is largely dependent on public policy, and it is socially provided. That, after all, is why even the most advanced and market oriented nations have departments (or ministries) of education.

Given that such an education system is policy driven, it must be based on what policy makers have identified as socially desirable ends that education can help a particular society attain. The identified ends will in turn influence the selection of means and methods. When carefully selected, a harmony between ends and means contributes to the development of an effective system of education widening.

This is all well and good so long as such education widening takes place within the confines of one societal boundary. It might even operate, perhaps with minor glitches here and there, in another society whose level of social, economic, and political development is comparable to that of the society where the education system originated. However, the history of the wholesale transfer of education systems has not been one of societies at one level of development adopting the education systems of other societies at the same level of development. Rather, the transfers of education systems have been between societies that are at unequal levels of development. And this leads us to the second of the two problems mentioned above.

Specifically, education systems have been borrowed by tradition-bound non-modern societies from the more modern industrialized societies. While this trend of education transfer is quite understandable, it is also recognizably problematic.

Key to the problem of education transfer from modern to non-modern societies has been the issue of receptivity, given the considerable differences in the values and needs of the two types of societies. What are the determinants of receptivity or resistance to the transfer of an education system from more modern to less modern societies? Looking at the experiences of the two countries, Japan and Ethiopia, how did each proceed with the task of selecting and adopting a modern education system? What were the levels of receptivity to the imported system of education? And what elements in each country's situation influenced the level of receptivity or resistance to imported education? The following discussion will address these questions.

### **Receptivity to Modern Education**

Receptivity to an imported education system from abroad was significantly different in Ethiopia from that experienced in Japan. There are several factors that can account for the different outcomes. Some of these factors are quite obvious, but others are subtle. They include:

- A. Geography (both physical features and location in relation to other countries)
- B. The contemporary polity and the line-up of national policy priorities
- C. The size and strength of groups resisting modernization
- D. The type of lessons extracted from early (and traumatic) encounters with the west
- E. The type and level of education already established within the country.

These factors and the manner in which they impacted on attempts at education reforms in the two countries are discussed below.

#### **A. Geography and Receptivity to Education Modernization**

##### **Ethiopia**

The role that geography plays on the movement and adoption of international cultures, including education, can be quite significant. In the case of Japan and Ethiopia, geography played quite contrasting roles. Ethiopia's geography is one of high plateaus surrounded by arid deserts or malaria prone lowlands. "Some of the highest, most rugged and inaccessible places on the African continent are found here..."<sup>3</sup> David Korten highlights these same geographic features of the land when he writes:

Located between Asia and Africa, this plateau has stood as a nearly impregnable mountain fortress, set apart from the forbidding deserts surrounding it by steep slopes and escarpments of up to 4,000 feet high. The highland plateau is itself a virtual equatorial paradise, with cool climate, fertile soil, and abundant rainfall. It represents a dramatic contrast to the fierce heat and the barren soil of the eastern desert, which drops to some 400 feet below sea level. Ethiopia has stood from ancient history to modern times cut off from the remainder of the world, largely withstanding both the invasions of surrounding Moslem peoples and the European

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<sup>3</sup> Spectrum Guide to Ethiopia, Nairobi: Camerapix Publishers International, 1995 Revised Edition p. 19



colonists who at one time occupied and ruled most of the remainder of the African continent.<sup>4</sup>

Before the onset of modern transportation, this geography made the country inaccessible except to the most inquisitive visitor from afar. While this did insulate and protect the land from unwanted intruders, it has had at least two lasting effects on the country's situation.

First, there is little doubt that this helped preserve the culture and tradition of the country by minimizing the introduction and incorporation of other cultures. It thus contributed to Ethiopia's unique social and cultural identity. It was also a factor that helped preserve the country's independence over the centuries. But there is also a second—and perhaps not so benign—effect of this isolation. In effect, Ethiopia's geography offered its people the option of self-isolation with all its attendant consequences; and they willingly chose to exercise it.

The isolation first imposed on a people by geography leads to the development of belief systems, institutions, and practices that gradually come to be regarded as “unique” national traits that sets the country apart from other countries. A growing sense of one's own uniqueness would, in turn, instill feelings of suspicions and distrust against outside influences. A country's isolation can thus become self-enhancing over time. The result was that Ethiopia's geography interacted with its national sense of uniqueness to become an important factor in preventing or slowing down the introduction of new ideas and practices from the rest of the world. Without links to the external world, the country's institutions, including its education, were deprived of the revitalizing benefits of new ideas and cultures. Such self-isolation left the country's social and economic progress lagging far behind that of other countries, including those that it may have once compared favorably with.

## Japan

The geography of Japan, on the other hand, posed few obstacles to the flow of ideas and cultures from countries near and far. Being an island nation, practically all the coastal regions of the country have been relatively accessible by sea. This has historically made it easy for persons and things foreign to reach Japan, and it also made it easy for adventurous Japanese to travel in and out of the country. It may be possible that Japan, just like Ethiopia, may have found some comfort and collective peace of mind in seclusion and insulation from the vagaries and potential dangers of foreign intrusions. In fact this may well be the natural tendency of all societies, if given the choice. But unlike that in Ethiopia, geography made the option of self-isolation unavailable to the Japanese. Lacking a natural means with which to block out intruders, Japan had no choice but to direct its energy to the managed accommodation of such intrusions. It is perhaps this reality that has shaped the character of Japan as an adaptable nation. Quoting Leonard Schoppa:

Japan is known as an adaptable nation - famous for its success in achieving two great transformations in its modern history. First, following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, a cadre of reformists were able to transform feudal Japan into a fast

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<sup>4</sup> David C. Korten, Planned Change in a Traditional Society, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972. pp.17-18

growing modern nation state by directing all of the nation's energies toward the goal of catching up with 'the west'. Then, after the Second World War, Japan was able to adjust equally efficiently to a new world order dominated by the united states - incorporating new democratic institutions and continuing its campaign to achieve economic parity with the western powers. In each of these great transformations, education reform played a central role. In the Meiji period, the reformist leaders' decision to institute universal primary education and a meritocratic system gave Japan an educated and trainable workforce and a talented elite at a time when the nation needed to make maximum use of its human resources in its effort to catch up. Later, following the war, the reforms carried out under the Allied Occupation succeeded in creating a more egalitarian and democratic education system, making it even more efficiently meritocratic at a time when the nation needed skilled workers to power its post-war recovery.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, the country's location has placed it in the proximity of some of the earliest and most advanced civilizations in the world. Ideas and practices that arrived from China, and also from as far away as India, had registered strong cultural impacts on Japan long before the arrival of Western influence. This clearly is a measure of the influence of the country's geography. But geography also sets in motion other secondary factors. The receptivity that was initially precipitated by geography will in turn lead to greater receptivity. That is because such receptivity to new ideas and cultures can gradually become self-augmenting. For example, once Japan borrowed the writing system as well as the social-political philosophy of China, the sense of urgency to protect Japanese society from things Chinese tends to diminish. The foreign and the foreigner need no longer represent danger. Instead, Japanese authorities resorted to pragmatically and selectively adopting imported ideas so long as those ideas did not jeopardize their own privileged positions in society. Following the Meiji Restoration, the country launched itself even more vigorously to function as an open system. This had its risks. The country did open itself up to both potential threats and opportunities that any open system faces. However, Japanese civic and political leaders seemed fully aware of this. They did not leave things to chance when deciding to adopt western ideas and methods.

#### B. A Cohesive and Coherent Polity and Receptivity to Education Modernization

The form and philosophy of government, the articulated policies of governance, and the institutions and mechanisms of government can strongly influence the receptivity of a society to imported education. Basic to this is the existence of a centralized form of government with authority to design and implement a national education policy that is consistent with national goals for social and economic development. It is interesting to note that, both in Japan and Ethiopia, the *attempt* to introduce modern (i.e., western) education did not commence in full until each country set itself on a course of achieving a centralized form of government. The more successful the attempt at political centralization, the greater the sense of urgency with respect to education reform and the fewer the obstacles to the introduction of western education.

#### Ethiopia

Here again, the factor of polity did not favor Ethiopia's chances at modernizing its education. In significant ways, the "Zemene Mesafint" (or the "Era of Princes") did not in

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<sup>5</sup> Schoppa, Leonard J., Education Reform in Japan, pp. 1 & 2

any real sense come to an end at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Referring to Emperor Haile Selassie in the 1930s, John Markakis observes, “Although he had rid himself of the most recalcitrant members of the old nobility, the Emperor still had to reckon with several powerful provincial rulers.”<sup>6</sup> As history indicates, loyalty to the Emperor and to the central authority in Addis Ababa remained tentative and conditional even on the eve of the Italian invasion.

What this means is that, even as late as two to three decades into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Ethiopian polity had, underneath its thin skin of modernity, basically remained feudal and traditional. Administration of the affairs of the people beyond the reach of the capital was left to the whims of hereditary lords and their subordinates. And in the zero-sum game proposition that characterizes relationships between the ruler and the ruled under a feudal system of government, “administration” seldom meant more than just protecting the power and expanding the wealth of the ruler at the expense of the ruled. From the economic perspective, these rulers could demand and receive practically all the labor that they required for free. Given that, the administration of their economic affairs did not necessitate the substitution of intensive labor use for extensive labor use. In their scheme of cost and benefit calculation, better labor was not more preferable than more labor. Building schools and educating Ethiopia’s youth could hardly fit into this mode of economic management. And it didn’t. If a modern school system was both late and slow in making its appearance in the capital, it was even later and slower in working its way to the provinces. Reflecting the narrow span of central authority control over developments in the land, Ethiopia’s early education modernization efforts were confined only to the capital city, the part of the country that was under the direct control of the Emperor.

Historically, Ethiopia’s monarchs did not seem to envision for themselves leadership responsibilities beyond protecting the country’s international borders. When they were not engaged in defending the borders, a lot of their attentions were devoted to putting down internal dissension. Throughout the reigns of both Emperors Menelik and Haile Selassie, maintaining authority over the different regions of the country became an all-consuming task that elevated military matters to their highest level of leadership priority. This sapped much resource and energy to the detriment of modernization on other fronts, including the education front.

Where the Emperors may have shown sufficient commitment to promoting modern education, many of the lords surrounding them were outright hostile to it. National development or national education goals could not be designed and promoted under those conditions. National resources could not be mobilized to underwrite modern education on a national scale.

Finally, the autocratic form of government that had ruled Ethiopia was itself a major point of resistance to education reform. The monarchy was at the apex of a delicately balanced structure of social and economic relationships whose core organizing methods were coercion, fear and superstition. These arrangements had to be protected if the monarchy was to survive. But there were also practical problems with attempting to reform just education while leaving intact these other aspects of society. The need for modernization was pitted against the call for self-preservation. This fact was not lost on Ethiopia’s rulers. As a result, successive autocratic governments could not afford to do more than

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<sup>6</sup> John Markakis, Ethiopia: *Anatomy of a Traditional Polity*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974, p. 202

just pay lip service to education reform. In general, when it come to addressing their basic social and economic needs, Ethiopians became accustomed to expect and ask little from their autocratic leaders, and they received little from them. Absent the mechanisms of meaningful elections and other measures of accountability, the concept of government leaders as servants of the public interest remained an alien notion. This was the situation that prevailed in Ethiopia until the eve of the Second World War.

## Japan

Although beset for several centuries by political fragmentation and feuds between regional warlord similar to those experienced by Ethiopia, Japan's 19<sup>th</sup> Century attempts at political centralization proved relatively more successful. The era that is known as the Meiji restoration came to represent an enduring and genuine establishment of centralized authority at the expense of the power of the regional lords known as Daimios.

The Meiji Restoration in Japan, dating from 1868, ...was ostensibly to restore the emperor of Japan to a position of primacy that was obscured during the Tokugawa and earlier shogunates. In practice, however, the emperor ended up with little more power than before, and real power passed to a different group of samurai who instituted a constitutional monarchy. This form of government was chosen in conscious imitation of what the Japanese modernising elite saw as the most effective forms of government in Europe and the Americas, and as they were willing to borrow wholesale a form of government, they were willing and eager to borrow other institutions including an educational system.<sup>7</sup>

This made it possible to create the political, legal, and administrative basis for developing modern institutions, including a modern education system. The centralized authority was able to provide direction for the development of society, and education was given full support as a means to achieving those goals. As an example, a frequently enunciated goal of the Meiji era was "catching up with the west" militarily, economically, and technologically. This goal in turn paved the way for the rapid introduction and diffusion of western type education throughout Japan.

If the prime model for government was the UK, the prime models for education were the USA and France. The USA impressed the Japanese with the way it managed to get a great number of children into schools, and France impressed the Japanese with its high level of advanced training for a political and technological elite. So the ruling groups in Japan made the decision to establish a system of universal, compulsory elementary schooling and very high quality selective post-compulsory training. While this was based on a foreign model, it is hardly surprising that the foreign model chosen was very compatible with the traditional elite and hierarchical nature of Japanese culture.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond the establishment of a centralized authority, the interpretation and formulation of national priorities are important factors in determining a society's receptivity to the modernization of its education. Such interpretation in turn rests on the perception of sources of threats and security. If the perceived threat of security is the warlord in the adjoining province, any security benefits that a modern system of education may offer is not readily seen. If, on the other hand, the threat is perceived to come from a more

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<sup>7</sup> James, Estelle. And Benjamin, Gail, Public Policy and Private Education in Japan, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988 p.11

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 12

technologically advanced country with a modern economy and military, a centralized authority would sooner or later recognize that its relative backwardness is its number-one enemy. Having recognized that, it would be keen on acquiring the benefits of modern education.

A key distinction that exists between the experiences of the two countries should be noted here. Japan succeeded in establishing both a centralized government authority and at the same time committed itself to the goal of modernizing its education. These two developments complemented each other, thus making possible the rapid modernization of Japanese education. But Ethiopia was unable to achieve effective centralization during the critical decades during late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, and that undermined its commitments to, and efforts at, education modernization.

### C. Domestic Resistance and Receptivity to Education Modernization

By its nature one normal function of education is to instill change in ideas, attitudes, and the ways in which individuals and groups within society relate to one another. There was strong resistance to the introduction of foreign education both in Japan, until the start of the Meiji era, and in Ethiopia as late as the eve of the Second World War. However, the sources of resistance were different in each country.

### Ethiopia

In the case of Ethiopia, one can detect both parallels and distinctions with the type of resistance to modern education that was experienced in Japan. There is a parallel in that one basis of such resistance is the commitment to orthodoxy in education. As in Tokugawa Japan, the view prevailed in Ethiopia that all that is knowable was already known. That being so, there was no need to introduce or even tolerate reforms in education. But there was also a distinction.

As was indicated above, Ethiopia's geography made national insulation an option that was both possible and practicable up to a point. Such self-insulation was defended in the name of the protection and preservation of national identity. Topping the list of elements of national identity that became the fountain of resistance to education reform was the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church enjoyed a monopoly on the education taught at many of the important centers of national power. Practically all of the education to which the Christian population had access was entirely being provided by the church.

How important was this domination of Ethiopia's education by the church? According to Dr. Teshome, "Church education...aimed to prepare priests, monks, *debtera*, and teachers to serve in the church's programs. Church education also produced civil servants, however, such as judges, governors, scribes, treasurers, and general administrators. There was no other source of trained personnel, and most civil servants shouldered the dual responsibility of serving both church and state"<sup>9</sup>

Was this education adequate to the task of preparing monks and administrators? The church, which for several centuries enjoyed an uncontested control over education in the highland region of the country, held on to a rather static view of education and learning. It had become a virtual museum of the knowledge and learning that was in vogue in the 4<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Wagaw, Teshome G., Education in Ethiopia, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979 pp. 10-11

Century AD, the time of the introduction of Christianity to the country. Its clergy flatly maintained that all knowledge was under the exclusive realm of God. Human attempts at seeking and expanding knowledge could, therefore, only be a mark of hubris that amounted to tampering with that which was forbidden to humans. Having embraced this anti-intellectual and anti-knowledge position, the clergy appears to have practiced what it preached. A sampling of observations from a parade of early travelers in Ethiopia draws an unflattering picture of the group:

Most travelers use extremely depreciatory words of the clergy, such as 'ignorant', 'besotted', 'lazy', and 'degraded'. Through the centuries, beginning even with the tolerant Alvarez, the criticism of the clergy has been almost unbroken. Ludolphus recorded that 'both the Patriarch and his Clergy are a poor sort of contemptible and rustic People and void of all common endowments'. 'Twelve thousand clerical drones ...fatten in idleness on the labour of the working classes', declared Harris. Plowden speaks of 'the almost daily spectacle of their drunkenness, excesses, and immorality'. Coulbeaux has equally hard things to say at greater length. Rey writes that they are ignorant and illiterate parasites. Baum speaks of the country as 'woefully priest-ridden'. Even Mrs. Sanford, latest and most sympathetic of commentators, stigmatizes the priesthood as 'ignorant, primitive and superstitious'.<sup>10</sup>

This is not exactly the sort of group that can offer enlightenment to a nation. However, it is too easy to conclude that the church, strangely enough, presided over an education system that championed ignorance. But this will be missing the point. Though it found itself in a position of monopoly with respect to the provision of Christian Ethiopia's education, the clergy's primary duty was never the dissemination of education. Its primary duty was the spreading (or, more accurately, the celebrating) of the Orthodox Christian faith. That does not mean that it did not interfere in the social and political life of the people; it did do that in very significant ways. The church clergy did not limit its influences and activities to matters of the faith. In fact, it freely interfered in all aspects of the social and economic life of Ethiopians. It is precisely the type and level of meddling in the every day lives of the people that opens it up to criticism.

The open hostility of the Ethiopian clergy to modernization of any form is legendary and well documented. Early movements to bring modernization to Ethiopia were seen as representing threats to the privileged status of the Church. The clergy were not entirely wrong in their perception of modernization as a source of threats. A new and modern education promised change. The longer Ethiopia and Ethiopian institutions had remained in isolation from the rest of the world, the more drastic the change that modernization and education reform threatened to bring. The strength of their resistance seemed to match the size of the threats that loomed over the future of the church and its clergy. For many in and out of the clergy, however, threats to the church were treated as being synonymous with threats to the country as a whole.

As a powerful institution with far reaching influences in the land, the Church did not stand alone in its resistance to education reform. It enjoyed the support of conservative feudal lords and, until the ascendance of Menelik II to the throne, the acquiescence and protection of the kings and emperors as well. Quoting Dr. Teshome again, "Never once, however, until the beginning of the present (i.e., the 20<sup>th</sup>) century, had any ruler sought to

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<sup>10</sup>Margery Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia* Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969, p.111

establish a secular program of education. Had one tried, he would perhaps have aroused the indignation of the church, as Emperors Menelik and Haile Selassie did later.”<sup>11</sup>

Unlike in Japan where Confucian philosophy and tradition had long nurtured respect for and the promotion of education at least at the level of the upper stratum of society, education in general and secular education in particular did not seem to enjoy the high regard of the Ethiopian populace. A curious early popular saying cited in Dr. Pankhurst’s 1998 article in *Addis Tribune* concludes that: “The worst of animals is a scorpion; and the worst of men is a scholar.”<sup>12</sup> Without weighing the quality of insight and the degree of veracity that may or may not be contained in the saying itself, what a popular sentiment like this reveals is the huge gulf that had separated Ethiopian scholars and scholarship from the every day lives and concerns of ordinary folks.<sup>13</sup> Church educated scholars devoted their time to reading from the scriptures and conducting religious rituals. When not engaged in such rituals, some even dabbled in magic and sorcery. The few scholars that had acquired foreign education carried the added burden of being too closely associated with foreigners and foreign interests. As a result, and quoting Dr. Teshome, “The influence of the foreign educated in the times of Emperors Tewodros, Yohannes, and Menelik was not so significant because of their affiliation with foreign missions, foreign ideas, or foreign religions. Such suspicions were real and difficult to overcome.”<sup>14</sup>

But even under the more recent leaders, the hands of these few educated Ethiopians were not set free to apply their skills and knowledge in the service of their country and people. For all his reputation as a modernizing leader, Emperor Haile Selassie did not go far enough in making use of the precious little human capital that he had at his disposal. As Perham points out:

The Emperor found it necessary in many cases to appoint older men of standing as ministers, and they, for the most part, were very naturally unable to appreciate the purposes or conduct the business of a ministry. To compensate for this deficiency, and also to give scope and practical expression to the desire for reforms of the younger men who had received some education, the Emperor appointed some of these as directors of departments under the ministers. This sometimes tended to produce friction or even deadlock, as the Emperor did not yet feel able to give strong support to the young reformers against their conservative superiors.<sup>15</sup>

This was a strategy more for assuaging the ambitions of powerful traditionalists and less for ushering modernization into a country that was already severely lagging in development. The ominous long-term implications of this arrangement could not have been hidden from these “directors of departments.” Aside from the frustrations and disappointments that these early Ethiopian scholars with modern education may have felt, their experience bespeaks of the numerous and persistent obstacles that lay in the way of introducing the benefits of modern education into the country.

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<sup>11</sup> Wagaw, p. 22

<sup>12</sup> Pankhurst, Richard, *History of Education, Printing and Literacy in Ethiopia*, from *Addis Tribune Archives*, 09, 18, ‘98

<sup>13</sup> One comes across such distrust and criticism of Ethiopia’s scholars even today. And the criticism comes not from the uneducated public, but from other Ethiopian scholars. The words “elite” and “elitism” are used to describe the unhealthy gulf that lies between Ethiopian scholars and the general Ethiopian public.

<sup>14</sup> Wagaw, p. 27

<sup>15</sup> Perham, p. 90

In denying these educated Ethiopians a meaningful role in shaping and directing the affairs of the country in a new direction, the leaders of Ethiopia squandered a golden opportunity to set the nation's future on a course of steady progress. That was a critical juncture in the history of the nation. But the tradition-bound aristocratic leaders of the land were both unwilling and unable to seize the moment and to provide the kind of bold leadership that the occasion called for.

The potential benefits and relevance of education appeared to be concealed not only from the ordinary folks, but from members of the Ethiopian aristocracy as well. Again quoting Dr. Pankhurst, "Most Ethiopian noblemen of this period are said to have been largely, if not fully, illiterate, and employed Church educated youths, to carry out their correspondence."<sup>16</sup> This translated into an unfavorable environment for the dissemination of education and the onset of modernization throughout the country. As Perham points out, "...little machinery existed for executing outside the capital the measures drawn up within it. The tendency, therefore, was for the activities connected with social services, public works, police, finance and the rest to be concentrated mainly in and around Addis Ababa."<sup>17</sup>

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Ethiopia thus appears to be a hostile environment for the kind of education reform that Japan pursued with unmitigated vigor. In the self-serving calculation of Ethiopia's leaders of the time, modern education promised more threats and costs than benefits. Ethiopia's clergy and aristocracy saw only risks to their privileges. The emperors, even in those rare instances when they were committed to education reform, were reluctant to anger the Church and the aristocracy whose support and loyalty were crucial for their own survival. The rest of society had no civic voice and was not yet experiencing sufficient autonomy in social and economic matters to make its own demand for reforms in education. It was a situation in which there was plenty of resistance and little impetus to the introduction of modern education on a national scale.

## Japan

Resistance to newly imported education in Japan was mostly from political authorities that were unnerved by the implications of rapid education inspired-changes in social and political relationships. This concern of authorities with the unwelcome implications of imported education is illustrated in various sources. The following decree was part of the series of measures that constituted the Kansei Reform (Kansei no kaikaku), that were intended to insulate the Tokugawa rulers from rapidly evolving changes in various aspects of life.

"In 1790, Matsudaira Sadanobu, chief councillor of the Tokugawa bakufu and regent to the shogun, issued a decree to Hayashi Kimpo, rector of the Shoeiko, where the study and explication of neo-Confucianism had enjoyed official support since 1630. It warned that:

Since the Keicho era (1596-1614), all generations have put their trust in Neo-Confucianism, and your house has been ordered to support that doctrine. Therefore, you should watchfully encourage that orthodoxy and promote its students. Recently, however, the world has witnessed the rise of several new

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<sup>16</sup> Pankhurst,

<sup>17</sup> Perham, p. 90



doctrines; heterodoxy has become a fashion; customs have suffered from it; and orthodoxy [seigaku, written with characters, meaning 'correct learning' or 'sacred learning'] has declined. This is a deeply regrettable situation. Even among your pupils, it is said, impure doctrines have spread. I hereby order you to discipline the school strictly....Regardless of whose students they are, they should study orthodoxy, and in this way you should apply yourself to promoting the formation of talented men.<sup>18</sup>

A closer look reveals this to be a remarkable passage in that it captures the contradictions and conflicts inherent in policies on education under autocratic regimes. It is the contradiction that results from the fact that education is a vehicle for change, and yet change is what an established authoritarian system is bound to fear the most.

The "orthodoxy" that the Japanese authorities of the time favored, with its emphasis on textual learning and rituals, blocked the onset of the vitality and dynamism that is inherent in heterodoxy. The former conceived of a world of knowledge that is long established and static. The latter treats knowledge as both fluid and ever expanding. It is fundamentally about multiple interpretations and reinterpretations of the human experience in the light of new and changing facts and perspectives. The former seeks to legitimize and preserve the status quo, but the latter often sets the stage for the challenge and dismantling of the same.

Orthodoxy was the form of education that advocated a single world view which successive Tokugawa regimes found compatible with the protection of their own feudal political power. It was not unlike the church controlled system in Ethiopia in that it placed education and knowledge in a straight-jacket since it too maintained that knowledge is fixed and that the existing type and level of knowledge contained all that can be known by humans. The "heterodoxy" that the Tokugawa authorities found so objectionable was education in its more modern form, one that allowed for different perceptions and interpretations of human experiences. Heterodoxy recognized that human knowledge is ever changing and expanding. This is education in its ideal progressive form. But, ideal or not, it was not hard for the authorities to recognize that heterodoxy could easily plant the seeds of critical thinking that would lead to the pursuit of forms of political and social relationships that are quite different from the ones that they had come to embrace.

To summarize the preceding point, the resistance by the authorities during the closing days of the Tokugawa era is directed not so much to education or even the dissemination of education itself, but to the emergence of new forms of education that promised new views and attitudes. The source of resistance came from the highest Japanese authorities of the time. Yet these authorities had, in the past, displayed sufficient support for some form of education to expand in various parts of the land, an education system that had gradually expanded in content and geographic reach as it sought to accommodate changing commercial and administrative needs in the land. This earlier education had helped produce merchants, teachers, and other groups with their own specific social and economic interests. These interests eventually formed the basis for the growing call for reform in Japanese education. Equally important to the promotion of education in Japan, the Japanese authorities were themselves highly literate and, therefore, were invested in and appreciative of the benefits of education as such. If they had growing concerns with

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<sup>18</sup> Beauchamp, Edward R., *Windows on Japanese Education*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1991 p.1

respect to education, it was in that they were beginning to sense major changes in the air that threatened to upset established traditions.

In one sense, the Tokugawa rulers had good cause to be nervous about the “heterodoxy” in education since its arrival coincided with rapidly unfolding changes throughout society itself. Both the regime and its resistance to the new form of education came to an end with the arrival of the Meiji era in 1867. Once the regional shogunates were dismantled, the ranks of the noblemen lost their lands and political authorities. Having lost their traditional base of power, they quickly became part of the modernizing force in the land as many of the off-springs of this class of Japanese joined service in the new government. Many others of the group started modern sector businesses, or traveled abroad to acquire modern education.

#### D. Lessons of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Encounter with the West and Receptivity to Education Modernization

Both Japan and Ethiopia had experienced unwelcome encounter with powerful western nations during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Any ambivalence towards acquiring western education that the two countries may have had was put to rest when the U.S. subjected Tokyo harbor to naval bombardment in the 1860s and Italy invaded Ethiopia in the 1890s. The two western nations employed their technological advancement and industrial might to project their military power against countries on distant continents. These events represented defining moments for both Japan and Ethiopia in that each country could weigh and assess its condition and standing in relation to the rest of the world. But the two events had different outcomes in both the immediate conclusions of the encounters as well as the lessons that each country was able to draw.

#### Ethiopia

For Ethiopia, the encounter with Italy in 1896 may have also prompted some form of soul-searching, but any impetus for full throttle modernization that it could have generated was blunted by the fact that the invader was defeated. It was defeated in spite of its superior technology and sophisticated military organization. This could hardly be the basis for Ethiopians admiring and emulating western education in the ensuing years. The Ethiopian spear proved mightier than the Italian tank. Or so it seemed then. Who would need to acquire the education that helped build the tank? In winning the battle of Adua, the Ethiopians lost the element of anxiety that could have served as an impetus for further national progress. Count Gleichen of the 1897 British diplomatic mission wrote:

Up to this time all Europeans had been looked up to in Abyssinia with respect, if not fear. Adua, to use a vulgarism, upset the apple cart and entirely altered the views of the natives. The body of the Abyssinian people even now imagines that their victory has laid not only Italy, but the whole of Europe, at their feet and their heads are proportionately elevated.<sup>19</sup>

To the extent that the Emperor recognized the need to bring modernization to Ethiopia, he sought to do so with the cooperation and assistance of European countries. Referring to this sentiment of the Emperor, Gleichen wrote, “He has recognised that the only way of

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<sup>19</sup> Pankhurst, Richard. “Late Nineteenth Century Images of Ethiopia, in Addis Tribune, March 9, 01

bringing his country into line with the other Powers of the world is to keep in touch with them, and as far as possible to imitate their mode of progress and civilisation. His 'line', therefore, is to make friends with European nations, and with their help, to develop his country."<sup>20</sup> At a time when almost all the important European nations were set on a path of colonizing Africa, the Emperor's wish to draft European assistance to modernize his nation was not realistic.

This "the Europeans can do it for us" sentiment is in stark contrast to the "can do" attitude of Japanese leaders. Instead of placing Ethiopia's future at the mercy of the good-will of European powers, the occasion called for the country's leaders to stomp across the width and length of the land building new schools, recruiting teachers, and brow-beating parents to send their children to school. They could have sent young Ethiopian to Europe by the hundreds, as did Japan, to bolster the ranks of the educated. They could have issued edicts, promulgated laws, garnered all necessary resources and placed the weight of their offices and personal prestige to remove the stubborn obstacles to modernization that existed throughout the empire. The Emperor's leadership would have been crucial, but it was not forthcoming. It took twelve years after Adua before the barest minimum foundation for a modern school was laid with the opening of Menelik II School in 1908. Access to this one school was not for everyone either, "A group of young nobles were selected to attend, among them being two future emperors: Lij Yasu, who succeeded Menelik, and Dejazmatch Tafari Makonnen, who was to become Emperor Haile Selassie."<sup>21</sup> The Emperor died in 1913 without building another school. It then took another eighteen years after the opening of Menelik II School before another school "for the nobility" was opened in Addis Ababa by the then Regent, Tafari Makonnen.

That does not mean that Emperor Menelik himself was not sincere about wishing to bringing modernization to Ethiopia. All evidences suggest that he was. Visitors who met him marvel his curiosity and interest in novel ideas and gadgets. His wish to see Europeans help him bring modernization to his country indicated the depth of his interest. But the leadership requirements of the period went far beyond mere wishful thinking and a tendency to lean on imaginary friendships. The notion that any one of the nations that were parties to the Berlin Conference would positively respond to his wishes was both a measure of his misreading of the geo-political signs of his age as well as of the desperate lack of domestic support for his ambitions. In either case, the Emperor showed no desire to expend his considerable political capital to overcome the numerous obstacles that stymied efforts to transform Ethiopia's archaic education. That was a serious lapse of leadership. It was a lapse in leadership that condemned the nation to decades of social and economic weakness. It was also a lapse in leadership that left the door open for Maichew and the devastating attacks against the very causes that the Adua's patriots fought and died for.

The down side to the Adua encounter with the west is, therefore, that it left Ethiopians more contented than before with who they were and where their society stood in the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. If there were ominous signals in the encounter to alert them of the momentous changes that would soon occur in their global environment, and there clearly were, they chose to ignore them. Unable to discern any national disadvantage in the country's position *vis a vis* the rest of the world, Ethiopians returned from their victory with no sense of urgency to address the country's severe deficit of

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Markakis, p. 145

modern infrastructures. The “Hidden Kingdom” chose to hide from the hard facts that were confronting it.

Meanwhile events and developments in the world did not stand still. The ground on which the country’s traditional relationship with the outside world had rested was now shifting from underneath its feet. The industrial revolution was in full swing in Europe and America, and its impacts were transforming societies. A new era was dawning in which any future victory of any kind must first be preceded by peace time victory in the development of factory towns, industrial centers, and expanding institutions of education. Industrial and economic power was supplanting military power as the only relevant foundation for national security.

## Japan

For Japan, the bombardment of its capital city by a distant nation was a wake-up call that became a stark reminder of its technological backwardness and its vulnerability to foreign invasions. The event also accelerated the demise of the Tokugawa regime, which regime was shown above to be opposed to education reforms and modernization. It also strengthened the voices of reformers who advocated the modernization of Japanese society according to European and American models. “Catching up with the west” became the rallying cry of reformers. And the first catching up to be accomplished was in the area of the modernization of Japanese education. The drive for modernization had the backing of the highest Meiji government authorities, and members of the former samurai class were sent abroad to acquire western education. By 1893, a total of 23, 960 schools had been built, and the total number of students, in both public and private schools, stood at 3.34 million.<sup>22</sup> The commitment to modernization was strong, and Japanese authorities never looked back.

The encounter with the west left different impressions and impacts in the two countries. In 1905, some forty years after the bombardment of Tokyo harbor, Japan had mastered western naval technology sufficiently to build its own battle ships and defeat Tsarist Russia’s navy in a major naval battle. The world was put on notice that Japan had made good on its vow to catch up. In 1935, also some forty years after the battle of Adua, Mussolini’s Italy invaded and occupied Ethiopia. The Italians had war aircraft and chemical weapons in their arsenal when they made their call this time. The Ethiopians headed to battle with practically the same spears and swords that they deployed against the enemy forty years earlier. The Ethiopian Emperor fled his country to seek protection from the same forces that quietly schemed over his nation’s downfall. Yet, these forces had already determined that the Emperor’s Ethiopia was too backward to merit their intervention. Backwardness and defeat became the price of lessons not learned.

These outcomes illustrate the stark contrast in the lessons that each country was able to draw from its first encounter with the forces of the modernized west. Japan committed itself to “catch-up” with the west. Critics may argue that, in so doing, the country traded its own national identity because it consciously decided to imitate the west. Another interpretation would be that Japan was able to preserve its independence and identity precisely because it successfully imitated the west in those areas of economy and technology that could contribute to its national integrity and resilience.

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<sup>22</sup> James and Benjamin, p.13

For the Ethiopians, it is tempting to suggest that victory on the battlefield spelt defeat on the modernization front. Can it then be concluded that it would have been better for the Ethiopians if they had lost the battle of Adua?

In comparing the two countries' responses to encounters with the west, it is important to note the distinctions in the natures and implications of the encounters themselves. When on July 8, 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry of the United States Navy sailed into Tokyo harbor and forced Japan to enter into trade with the United States, he was neither prepared nor did he intend to occupy any of the Japanese islands. All he demanded was a treaty that allowed trade and the opening of Japanese ports to U.S. merchant ships. The impression that the incident made on the Japanese was more as one of an awakening call than as an instrument of destruction and loss. It was an inexpensive but valuable lesson for the Japanese to eventually benefit by. That, however, cannot be said about Ethiopia's encounter with the Italians at Adua.

The Italians came to Adua for the purpose of invading and occupying the entire country. A defeat in the hands of the Italians would have destroyed everything the Ethiopians treasured. Without a country that they could call their own, the idea of "learning lessons from defeat" would have been of no consequence to them. For those who suggest that colonization could have brought with it modernization, it should be pointed out that a defeated Ethiopia would have fared no better than does the former Italian colony of Somalia today. The Ethiopians' victory at Adua may not have helped launch their nation on a path of modernization. But it did enable them to serve a crushing blow to a dangerous enemy, enhance their country's standing within the community of nations, and secure for themselves the right to remain masters of their own destiny. There are not gains to scoff at. If flaws can be pointed out, it is in that the victorious nation failed to build on its gains. It was unable to chart strategies and to mobilize resources on the domestic development front with the same zeal and determination that it did on the battle front.

E. Already Existing Level of Education and Receptivity to Education Modernization  
As pointed out at the beginning of this paper, education, when allowed its own natural course of development, can be a self-augmenting process. This simply means that more education begets more education. Likewise, the receptivity to the introduction of a new system of education is likely to be better enhanced if there exists an already developed system of education. This is so because the country would already have in place the manpower as well as the institutional resources that are needed to receive and effectively utilize the new system of education. Other things being equal, the better developed the education system, the smoother the receptivity to the new education. While it is possible for resistance to arise from groups with vested interest in preserving the established system of education, there will be other groups, and in greater numbers, to overcome such resistance and press for the promises and benefits of education reform.

How did the type and level of established education systems found in the two countries compare with one another?

## Ethiopia

With respect to Ethiopia, it may be argued that the existing type and level of education, while limited in its reach and narrow in scope, was still adequate to the task for which it

was applied at the time. After all, it did sustain a national literary culture for several centuries, albeit a literary culture that was narrowly confined to the church. In fact some even assert that “Traditional Christian Ethiopia is a literate society possessing its own highly developed written language and body of literature comprising religious and historical works.”<sup>23</sup> And one might argue that the existence of such culture proves that Ethiopia was and is self-reliant in education. But this is an argument that can be made only if education is stripped of its numerous and significant social and economic roles.

In general, education that was rooted in early religious institutions was not of the type that prompted a more diverse and expanded education, except in the furtherance of narrowly defined dogma. That is because those early churches tended to see life and the conditions that surround it as basically pre-ordained and its purposes and goals well-settled once and for all. The result was that all new ideas came to be regarded with deep suspicions by the church clergy. It is reported that Negus Sahlesellasie quickly abandoned any idea of introducing windmills in Debre Berhan when the clergy of the time declared the contraptions “works of the devil.” They could just as readily declare many elements of modern secular education “works of the devil.” The church “educators” prescription for addressing all sorts of societal crisis was to rush the faithful to mass prayers. If evidence is needed to show the shortcomings of that strategy, one finds it etched in the myriad of social and economic problems that has beset the country over several decades. Accordingly, while there was established education on the ground in Ethiopia, it was one that made little contribution to the improvement of the lives of the people. It also blocked other avenues for such improvement as it openly and staunchly opposed the introduction of modern secular education.

The system was probably quite capable of producing scholars that were expected to dedicate their lives to the service of the church. But by refusing to recognize the legitimacy of other alternative uses of education, it may have also prevented the domestic cultivation of other forms of education that could address the more mundane and pressing needs of society. As Perham observes, “...it was uncertain at the beginning of this (20<sup>th</sup>) century whether a movement of educational reform could be made to flow into this extensive but conservative system or whether entirely new channels must be made for it. The education system given by the church, whether or not it was still effective for the training of boys to fill its own several orders, appeared to be out of touch with the needs and the awakening desires of the new century.”<sup>24</sup>

While Japan at the turn of century could boast over 3.3 millions students, Ethiopia’s public school system was still non-existent. According to one source, there were less than ten thousand students in the entire country on the eve of the second Italian invasion in 1935. “In 1925 the government adopted a plan to expand secular education, but ten years later there were only 8,000 students enrolled in twenty public schools. A few students also studied abroad on government scholarships. Schools closed during the Italian occupation of 1936-41.”<sup>25</sup> In spite of the very low level of education development

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<sup>23</sup> Markakis, p.144

<sup>24</sup> Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia*, p. 247

<sup>25</sup> University of Louisville Ekstrom Library, Government Publications,  
URL: <http://www.louisville.edu/library/ekstrom/govpubs/international/ethiopia/ethed.html>

throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, government commitment to build up the education infrastructure of the country remained weak. This is no where more evident than in the budget allocation priorities of the government.

A measure of the inadequacy of financial investment in education is provided by a comparison of actual performance with the goals set in a development plan adopted by the Ethiopian Government in 1961. This plan was the result of the recommendations adopted by the Addis Ababa Conference on Education, co-sponsored by the Economic Commission for Africa and UNESCO with the participation of the ministers of education of African states, in 1961. ...It was recommended that state investment in education should reach 4 per cent of the national income by 1965 and 6 per cent by 1980. The publication of the Report proved an acute embarrassment to the host country because statistics showed Ethiopia ranking among the lowest in the field of educational development.<sup>26</sup>

The actual budget allocations for the specified period fell far short of the target and came to less than 2 per cent of the national income. This is all the more surprising given the embarrassing evidence the conference provided of the country's lag in education behind most of the newly independent African countries—the very African countries that the Emperor's government sought to provide leadership for.

## Japan

It was pointed out above that the Tokugawa rulers grew increasingly nervous about the direction that education under their realm was taking. It should be noted, however, that resistance to heterodoxy in education by the Tokugawa rulers was not the same thing as resistance to education itself. Starting from 1603 and continuing until 1867, these rulers managed to end Japan's regional warfare and established a level of peace that aided economic progress and led to the rise of a merchant class. This condition favored the development of schools first based in temples but gradually spreading to towns and villages. The structure and content of education were, however, of the "orthodoxy" type that authorities approved. The shogunate itself built schools where members of the samurai class can study Confucianism, a philosophy that was quite in tune with the ideology of feudalism. Within the confines of orthodoxy in education, schools offered lessons in a relatively wide range of studies. Scholars who have studied the Tokugawa Shogunate point to the considerable progress that was made in the development of schools.

These schools consisted mainly of two types: the *hanko* for the samurai class and the *terakoya* for commoners. Between the two systems of education, the curriculum covered was fairly extensive. The *hanko* included the study of books written in Chinese, Classics of Confucianism, historical works, anthologies of Chinese poems, brush writing, study of Japanese thinkers, and medicine. The *terakoya* served like modern day primary schools and taught reading, writing and mathematics. As James and Benjamin argue,

Largely because of the educational legacy of two such systems already in place during Tokugawa times, Japan was able to move quickly and effectively to enlarge its educational reach. Education was compulsory and roughly uniform for all at the primary level, i.e. for the first six years. Beyond that, however, education

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<sup>26</sup> Markakis, *ibid.* p. 153. (In spite of its already low starting level relative to other African countries, the author points out that Ethiopia's investment in education was actually less than 2 per cent of its national income in 1965.)

was differentiated, vocational and highly selective. In its widespread compulsory primary stage the Japanese system was similar to the American; in its limited differentiated post-primary stage it was similar to systems prevailing in England, France and other European countries, which featured highly selective education...By 1902, 90 per cent of the children were attending school (at the compulsory level).<sup>27</sup>

In so far as the level of its educational development was concerned, it is clear that Japan was on a par with the most advanced industrial countries of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. If there was any controversy regarding modern education in Japan at the time, it was one that related to the level of government involvement in education or the degree to which principles of civil liberties and individual rights should be incorporated in the new education system.

### **Conclusion**

Education in society displays dual roles that are always in tension with one another. On the one hand, it is a tool that society wields to reproduce itself. As such, its significant effect is to preserve the beliefs and practices that a particular society has come to identify itself with. But education also plays a different and highly sought after role. That role is the introduction of new and better ideas and practices that will result in great benefits to both individuals and society. Which role of education prevails in society at any one time depends on the existence of several key factors and the alignment of various stakeholders.

The early experiences of Japan and Ethiopia with the acquisition of modern education have some similarities but many more differences. Japanese society had been at the receiving end of successive waves of ideas and practices from abroad. What was a foreign idea at the point of its arrival was soon converted into a Japanese idea with which both political authorities and scholars identified. Two critical factors worked in favor of education transfer and education development in Japan. The first was geography, both in the sense of the ease of accessibility of the land by sea and the country's proximity to major centers of world civilization, including China. The second was the favorable disposition of the lords and the samurai class towards at least some types of secular education. As a result, Japan did not show strong inhibitions towards importing and utilizing modern education. Instead, it systematically identified and selected the most promising education systems from around the world. It then proceeded to extract the practical social and economic benefits of the imported education while taking measures to preserve its base of cultural identity.

In the case of Ethiopia, the same two critical factors were present. But, instead of being favorable, these factors tended to work against education transfer and education development. Geography helped insulate the land and its people from influences from abroad. The only way that new ideas embodied in new education could leap-frog the formidable barrier of geography was if Ethiopian rulers threw their authority and resources behind the effort. But neither the monarchy nor the aristocracy felt the need to do so. Add to this the ever-watchful opposition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to any thing new and foreign, and the early introduction of modern education into the country never had a chance. Without the influx of new ideas, the country's social and economic life was condemned to stagnation.

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<sup>27</sup> James et.al., p. 12



The issue of modernization can generate intense debates. For some it represents an inevitable and necessary march of progress that promises a better quality of life for all. For others, it threatens the erosion of important human values and, if not managed properly, the descent of society into a moral, ethical and cultural abyss. People can and do make serious and sincere arguments on both sides of the issue. The signs of threats to the cultures and values of transitional societies are all around us. The integrity of national institutions, such as family, religion, civic organizations, traditional rules of conduct, etc., that should provide guidance and guardianship to the young are being eroded. National traits and identities are being diluted and discarded. Some feel a sense of loss of who they are and what they represent. But what is causing this to happen? Is modernization the cause? Or, are the problems indicated here the result of “insufficient” modernization?

To the casual observer who visits Ethiopia and Japan, one stark contrast between the two countries is in their respective attitudes and practices with respect to the preservation of their cultures and identities.

Over the preceding one hundred years of their western style modernization, the Japanese spared no effort in protecting their national culture and identity. Cultural artifacts are protected and promoted. Their cultural artists are supported and honored as national treasures. Their Emperor is still revered, but not feared. They appear committed to the promotion and use of things Japanese. Their spoken and written language is used in all settings, both formal and informal. Their education, with very few exceptions, is conducted in their own language at all levels. Store signs, business logos, restaurant menus, bank documents, and government forms are in Japanese. It is not unknown for an “international” conference to be conducted in Japanese, with translation provided for international guests. They buy Japanese products, patronize Japanese art and artists, and in general insist that there are Japanese ways of doing everything, and they quietly but proudly go about doing just that. It is a country where social and cultural identities are intensely protected. It is also the country that has consciously and determinedly sought to modernize itself in the manner of the west. Does this seem like a paradox? It is hardly so. Modernization and the economic benefits that it brought with it is what had made it possible for the Japanese to “talk the talk and walk the walk,” to borrow an American expression, when it comes to protecting and preserving their national identity. The country had built up the necessary knowledge, skills and wealth that it can bring to bear to make good on its intentions to protect its national legacies.

The situation could not be more different in Ethiopia. The signs of frayed and fragmenting society are displayed everywhere. Historical structures are crumbling. Ancient church artifacts and other national treasures are being peddled and scattered to all corners of the world. Traditional institutions are denuded beyond recognition. The landscape is degraded. Long cherished national symbols are altered, trivialized, or even abandoned. Government officials cavalierly declare that the nation has been in existence a mere one hundred years.

The city of Addis Ababa, a place that arguably represents the pulse of the rest of the nation, presents a picture of a country that is leaderless and without direction. Orphaned street children abound everywhere. The threat of deadly diseases hangs over everyone’s head. Many of those who can afford to stay off the streets have capitulated to the influence of every type of imported culture. Ancestral values and practices are either

ignored or belittled, and the most superficial forms of western culture are readily seized-upon as a mark of personal sophistication. There is a preponderance of foreign language and foreign vocabulary use in all kinds of settings, including family conversations. It seems as though the combination of fluent English and broken Amarigna (Tigrigna, Afan Oromo, or what have you) is treated as a sure ticket to personal success. Working for an international charity agency (NGO) is a pinnacle of career triumph even for those with the best education that the country has to offer. Many of the young are induced into rendering debasing services for the amusement of foreign visitors, or they travel far to settle into household servitude in various Middle Eastern countries. A foreign visa to some choice locations in Europe or North America is ardently sought for the chance to leave all that behind. The national airline hauls the national brain to be deposited on some distant shores. It is a human capital destruction on a scale that makes Graziani's much-lamented massacre of Ethiopia's educated few seem like a minor dent on the nation's education flank. And this airport blood letting is toasted and celebrated as both personal and family triumph.

The above characterization of Ethiopia's current socio-cultural scene may be highly impressionistic and thus not wholly accurate (I did start with "To the casual observer...", didn't I?). And the comments should not be taken as a criticism or attack of the country's young men and women; they are merely caught-up in the difficult struggle for survival that life in today's Ethiopia presents. If any thing, they should be admired for taking the initiative to grasp every opportunity for self-reliance. They strive to meet life's challenges in the only way they know how within a social and economic system that, it must be agreed, has failed its youth badly. And in spite of this gargantuan problem of national degeneration and decline, there is no visible sense of urgency among Ethiopians to adopt concerted efforts to reverse the current course. Those with the potential to provide leadership in addressing these problems hardly talk to one another. They have defaulted on that leadership because they are unable to communicate and cooperate across their newly discovered ethnic divide. The country's prospect to preserve its unique traditions thus faces a deadly mix of two constraints at the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: a missing national leadership and the aggressive globalization of unprocessed and highly commercialized western popular culture.

The great irony here is that few in the world equal Ethiopians in their sense of unique national identity and their pride in their history and culture. The need to preserve the country's cultural and historical legacies is a common and recurring theme among Ethiopians in all walks of life. The last emperor built a reputation for himself as a leader who took special care to strike a balance between the need to protect the country's tradition and the growing pressure for modernization. If that balance tipped to one side, it was clearly in favor of tradition as the very slow pace of modernization itself attests. The building of the usual midwives of social transformation, such as transportation, communication, education, media, etc., still lag far behind those of most other nations around the world. All these suggest that the country's social and cultural institutions should have remained intact in their original forms, and that its artifacts of tradition as well as its relics of history should be well preserved and protected. But, this is not to be. As the observation above indicates, all these symbols of national identity are fast corroding and crumbling. Furthermore, this trend is not being contested. If there is a hue and cry against this, it comes mostly from the "friends of Ethiopia." Protest from the Ethiopians themselves is too muted. How can that be? Are we being faced by another enigma here? Again, it is hardly so.

That Ethiopians care about preserving the symbols of their national identity is not in question; they do. But then, so do most other nations around the world. What Ethiopia has lacked is not the desire but the ability to act on that desire. It lacks the human and material resources with which to put up a credible defense in the protection of its unique national assets. And it lacks these human and material resources because it failed to anticipate a future that would be characterized by momentous changes in its domestic and international environments. Having failed to anticipate the change, it was caught unprepared to ride its waves. It is a case of “*yezenega tewega*.” In other words, it lacks the ability to protect its tradition precisely because it lacks the social and economic strength of a modernized nation. Society must maintain a healthy pace of social and economic progress if it is to inspire national pride and secure loyalty among its own youth. We must realize that it takes a population whose material and psychological needs are being adequately met to offer effective resistance to the global onslaught on traditional institutions and national values.

Tradition or modernization can never be the question. It is a false and untenable dichotomy. Each generation has both the opportunity and duty to build for itself and its progeny a life that is superior to the one preceding it. A generation’s ability to preserve its legacies from the past is contingent on its success in building a better life for itself in the present. The glory of the past will quickly fade if it does not get affirmed and reflected in the accomplishments of the present. A generation is yet to respond to the call of honoring the past with its deeds and, in the words of the poet, make Ethiopia “...like Japan, strong in everything.”

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